



F R E E D O M

TO

C A T H O L I C S,

CONSISTENT WITH

S A F E T Y

TO

T H E S T A T E.

BY A PROTESTANT.

BIRMINGHAM:
JAMES DRAKE, NEW-STREET.

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TO THE
INHABITANTS OF BIRMINGHAM.

FELLOW TOWNSMEN,

I do not doubt but that the greater part of you have, with myself, felt much sorrow and disappointment in witnessing the attempts which have been made, during the last few days, to excite in this town a spirit hostile to the measures now in contemplation of Government, for the relief of our countrymen of the Roman Catholic persuasion. It has always a bad appearance when a cause is supported by appeals to people's passions instead of to their reason: for we generally find that a cause which is advocated with violence instead of calm argument will not bear examination. Nothing is more common than for a man to throw himself into a passion in order to avoid looking foolish; and if the authors of the placards, which have of late defaced our walls, had been content to act on this principle in a private manner, there could have been no objection to their storming away to their hearts' content; but when they attempt to instigate others to join in their madness, it is a different matter: then we are all interested in

stopping the contagion. One madman, or ten madmen, can do but little harm ; they eventually find their way into Bedlam, and cease to annoy society ; but a host of madmen is a formidable thing, and may in a single hour commit excesses which it would take years to make good again. Such being the case, (and that it is so, Birmingham has learnt by dear experience,) it is the duty of every well-wisher to his country to do all that is in his power to frustrate the attempts of those who are trying to throw society into a state of insane convulsion : and it is not safe to trust to the apparent absurdity of the means which the violent take for obtaining their object. We all know the effect which was produced many years ago, (when some of the laws against the Jews were about to be repealed,) by the silly cry of “ No Jews ! No Wooden Shoes ! ” With the same motives, and with about as much charity and wisdom, the cry of “ No Popery ! ” is now raised by the opposers of concessions to the Catholics.

Instead of dinning our ears with such unmeaning noises, would it not be better to treat the thing dispassionately, and state in a quiet manner their reasons for opposing the progress of toleration ? If this were done, we should have an opportunity of examining them, and answering them ; but what reply can we make to the mere shout of No Popery ! Certainly none, unless it

be the one made lately at the meeting in Kent, when the cry of No Popery! was answered by that of No Foolery!

But now, instead of troubling you any farther about the silly cries and placards of which I have spoken, I will endeavour to make a plain statement of the case as it appears to me, in order that we may see whether or not we can be justified in refusing to admit our Catholic countrymen into the same rights and privileges that we possess, and which constitute our pride and glory.

The principal privilege which the Catholics are deprived of, is that of sending men of their own religious persuasion to represent them in Parliament: and as it is the main principle of the British Constitution that every interest should be represented in Parliament, it seems very reasonable that the Catholics should, like ourselves, have the means of expressing their wishes and opinions in a regular and peaceable way.

But it is objected that the Catholics are of such an ambitious nature, and are so hostile to Protestants, that if they once get any power into their hands they will never be content until they are masters of the whole country. Now supposing for a time that the Catholics had this craving wish to get uppermost in the state, are there not Protestants also who have as great a relish for power as them-

selves ? And do not these Protestants far surpass the Catholics in numbers and wealth ? Are we to suppose that the strength and talent of the Protestant Members of Parliament will vanish before the power of a few men whose only physical difference from themselves can arise from their having but a poor dinner every Friday ? The thing is absurd.—Look at those Protestant states in which the Catholics have been put upon an equality with Protestants, (for it is no new experiment,) look at the Netherlands, Prussia, Hanover, and Canada, and you will see that a Catholic is no such restless, plotting, discontented being, as we have occasionally imagined ; but that when his grievances are removed, he makes as good a neighbour and as good a subject as any of ourselves : and that he is uneasy only where every man deserving of the name of free man ought to be uneasy, namely, when under *oppression*. What would have become of English liberty if our sturdy ancestors (alike Catholic and Protestant) had been content to stand quietly by while their freedom was invaded, and how often this was done, history but too well shews.

When the Catholics were silent over their wrongs, then they were accused of apathy and slavish disregard to the privileges of freemen : but now that they have bestirred themselves and are asking for the removal of all degrading distinctions, they are charged with aiming at get-

ting an undue share of power, and of wishing to overturn institutions, which none are more interested in preserving than themselves; and which none have done more in establishing, than their, and our, Catholic ancestors. But as I said before, even supposing that they had the inclination to get this supreme authority into their own hands, where is their power? They have been admitted into competition with us in some things, and yet I am not aware that they have done us much harm. A Catholic can commence a trade, or open a shop, as well as a Protestant; and nevertheless the Protestants have as good a share of business as the Catholics: and we should be somewhat surprised if any set of tradesmen, as the bakers for instance, were to send petitions to Parliament, praying that no Catholic should be allowed to set up as baker, for that they were such a greedy set of fellows that they would in a short time get all the custom into their own hands, by which the ovens of the humble petitioners would, ere long, be left as empty as their heads!

So as regards the power of the Catholics in Parliament,—unless we suppose that the Protestants become the greatest set of dunces on the earth, and choose for their representatives none but Catholics, and such Catholics as will deprive them of the power of voting in future, we shall have nothing to fear from the admission of

Catholics into Parliament. The Protestant voters are greatly the more numerous, and will of course send the majority of Members to Parliament; and as long as we are safe in believing that five is a greater number than one, so long shall we be secure, that the Protestants will not be outvoted in Parliament. It would be as reasonable to expect one pound of lead to outweigh five pounds of iron; and the logic of an opposer of emancipation might be expressed in this manner:—"It is no use talking about small weights and large weights; for I know very well that lead is of such a heavy depressive nature, that if you once venture to put any of it in the opposite scale, be it ever so small a bit, yet some how or other it will soon be all up with the iron."

Another important security which we possess, that the country will never suffer from the Catholics being admitted into the enjoyment of their civil rights, is, that in all probability the numbers of the Catholics will begin to decrease the moment their disabilities are removed. At present the Protestants have not a fair chance, when attempting to dispel the errors of the Catholic faith, and to convert its adherents to the Protestant creed; for the Catholic religion is *protected* and *fostered* by persecution. This may seem to be impossible; experience, however, shews that it is not so, and a proof of this has

been lately given in the case of Carlile, as long as he was suffering punishment for the expression of his opinions, he succeeded in drawing attention and in selling his publications; but no sooner were the prosecutions against him abandoned, than he sunk into deserved contempt.

And it is natural that such should be the case. So wise has been the construction of the human character, that our pity is always awakened, and our sympathy excited in favour of an injured party; and urged on by our indignation, we often espouse the cause and adopt the creed of the party oppressed.

On this principle, then, so long as the Catholics are subject to privations, from which Protestants are exempt, so long will a charm and interest be attached to their cause which would not otherwise belong to it, and which will disappear the moment the Catholics cease to be distinguished from their Protestant countrymen; and at that moment, also, the powerful Protestant party, which is now exerting itself in their favour, will cease to act in their behalf.

It is well known that the Mahometan faith, which has been received by such immense numbers of people, owes its success principally to the persecution of its early believers; and, in fact, the Mahometans date the establishment of their religion from the banishment of Mahomet from Mecca.

But have the Catholics any wish to overturn the order of society, even supposing that they had the power, which they neither do nor ever can possess? It is but justice to them to say, that they probably retain no such desire. When, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the country was threatened with an invasion from Spain, the Catholics, though at the time suffering under severe laws,—though at that time the punishment of *death* was decreed against any Catholic who should convert a Protestant to his faith, and the same punishment of *death* against the Protestant who should be converted,—though at that time many Catholics were brought to the stake, for their firm adherence to opinions which they believed to be founded in truth, (for burning for religious opinions has not been confined to the Catholics,)—yet, notwithstanding all these facts, the Catholics no sooner found that their country was in danger from a foreign foe, (although that foe was an army of Catholics coming with the approbation of the Pope,) than, disregarding all private wrongs and despising the authority of the Pope, they offered their services to Government to resist the invaders. Their assistance was accepted, and the Spanish invasion which had excited such terror, was successfully repelled. This then shews, if other proof were wanting, that the Catholics are as firm in their love of this country, and of the

peace of society, as ourselves; that they are desirous of living on friendly terms with their Protestant countrymen, and that the charge that has been made against them of wishing to extirpate Protestants, is an unfounded calumny. Catholics, who are in a state of ignorance and depravity may entertain such mad wishes, but if they do so, it is because they are ignorant and depraved, and not because they are Catholics. The manner in which the Protestants have treated Catholics in times of ignorance, has not been less galling than that in which Catholics have treated Protestants in an equal state of ignorance. I have already mentioned, that in the reign of Elizabeth, the law appointed the punishment of death for the *offence* of converting a Protestant to the Catholic faith. Until a comparatively recent time, it was *death* also by law for any Catholic priest to perform mass; and as an instance of the degraded state in which the Irish Catholics have been kept, it may be mentioned, that until after the middle of the last century, they were not only unable to retain possession of such landed property as had descended to them from their ancestors, but they were prohibited from purchasing other land; or holding land upon any terms, even upon *lease*! And a premium was actually offered by law for the committal of one of the blackest crimes that a man can be guilty of; namely, filial treachery:

for it was decreed, that if the heir of any Catholic would desert his faith and become a Protestant, the Catholic owner of the Property (even if he were the very father of the wretch who was seeking his ruin) should be forthwith turned out of possession, and the whole should be given over to the Protestant heir! Can it be wondered at that men should murmur against such a system? Is it desirable that they *should not*?

From what I have said then, it appears, that men in a state of ignorance and alarm *will persecute*, whether they be Catholics or Protestants; and it is also easy of proof, that persecution ceases when the people become educated, and knowledge has been spread among them. That such has been the case in our own country, we have happily abundant evidence. The more rigorous of the laws against the Catholics, and all the laws that existed against *Protestant Dissenters*, have been repealed. The Catholics are not now obliged to skulk into secret places to perform that worship which they conscientiously believe essential to their future welfare; and the Protestant Dissenters have, within the last year, been admitted to a full participation of the offices and dignity of the state,—been virtually declared equal to any body of men in the kingdom, in their attachment to the institutions of their country, and in their anxiety for its permanent prosperity.

Though these improvements are justly a source of pride to us, yet we must be candid enough to allow that other states have made as great advances as our own, in liberality of conduct to those whose creed happens to differ from that of the party possessing the greatest power. In France, aye, in *Catholic* France, so completely free is the spirit of the laws from all intolerance towards the Protestants, that a provision is actually made by the Government for the support of the Protestant clergy. And this spirit of liberality is by no means a mere letter of law; for Protestants are received into society with as much cordiality as Catholics: and it rarely happens that the distinctions of religion are productive of any, the slightest unpleasant feeling. In the Catholic states of South America all the alterations that are made, from time to time, in the laws affecting religion, are in favour of toleration. Protestant churches are erecting in all the principal cities; and the name of Englishman (which with a Catholic always conveys the idea of a Protestant) is pronounced among the people with feelings of gratitude and respect—sensations which the noble act of the departed Canning, in first standing forward to recognize South American Independance, has done much to create. And shall we, instead of encouraging such feelings among the Catholics at home, among Catholics who have a claim upon us as living upon the

same soil, living under the same government, possessing the same interests, and connected with us by the innumerable ties that bind together the members of the same society,—shall we turn a deaf ear to their entreaties for admittance to 'our friendship upon terms of equality, and reject, with scorn, their proffered hand of reconciliation? Woe be to England if she persist in her cruelty! Then will she create discord and hostility, where she might have obtained tranquillity and friendship. And should the foreign foe attack her gates in the tumult, she will present but a feeble and divided resistance, instead of a firm and united band of patriots, before whom the sword of the mercenary would fall as from a paralyzed hand.

One main charge against the Catholics is, that they bind themselves to pay obedience to a foreign authority, namely, to the pope. Now in my opinion, (supposing for instance that the Catholics do so bind themselves,) the more completely foreign, and distant, the ruling power is placed, the better for us all. If I knew that a man, had sworn to obey implicitly, the orders of some desperate villain, who was at hand to call him to account for disobedience, I should think there was some danger in the matter, and should be very careful to keep out of his way. But if I learnt that a person had engaged to follow the directions of some one far away, as the Great

Mogul, for instance, I should consider it rather a subject for amusement than apprehension; as I should feel pretty sure that if he received orders which there was any hazard in putting into execution, he would either give a mere quiet interpretation to them, or which is more likely, throw them into the fire, and so clear his hands of them at once.

From this view of the case, then, I think it appears, that the further off this formidable being, called a pope, is, the better; and, therefore, that its being a *foreign* animal is a great advantage. A wolf on the Alps can do us but little mischief, but a wolf stalking about in our own fields and pastures, is an ugly being, and would soon rouse the shepherds to their duty.

But what kind of obedience do the Catholics pay to this distant monster, so formidable in name, but so feeble in reality? Why about as much as we expect to render to a man when we sign ourselves "his obedient humble servant;" and not more surprised should we be, if on the strength of such an expression, our correspondent were to order us to clean his shoes, or brush his coat, than a Catholic would be, if the pope were to order him to comply with all, that for form's sake, and in compliance with long usage, he promises. Nothing is more common than for a custom to remain, after the essential part of it is gone. Thus, long after the kings of England

had lost all hope of establishing a claim to the crown of France, they continued to assume the title of "King of France," and the French would have had quite as much wisdom in banishing from their country all Englishmen who might be found in it, on the plea that they were bound in allegiance to a sovereign who claimed possession of France, and actually styled himself its king, the French, I say, would at least have shewn *as much* sagacity in acting in this way, as we should do, in punishing the Catholics for any imaginary power which the pope may claim in the direction of the affairs of England.

How trifling the obedience is which the Catholics are disposed to yield to his papal majesty, history shews, even when the pope had a great deal of the substance of that power of which he now retains nothing but the shadow. Some of the severest laws that have ever been passed against the interference of the pope in the concerns of England, were passed in the reign of Edward the First, that is to say, more than two hundred years before the Reformation was even heard of, and when the pope was acknowledged to be the head of the church. These laws, called the laws of *præmunire*, impose very severe penalties on any one who shall venture to obey the authority of the pope, when opposed to that of government. And the king, by several direct acts, shewed how little he respected the direc-

tions of the representative of St. Peter. The pope forbid Edward's invasion of Scotland—Edward laughed at the pope, and marched northwards. The pope excommunicated an Englishman who had offended him—Edward ordered the messenger who brought the writ of excommunication to be hanged. The pope granted the English clergy an exemption from a tax that had been levied on the people generally—Edward seized on the property of the clergy in spite of the exemptions.

Nor has this disregard of papal authority been confined to our own country. It is now very many ages since the pope has ventured to oppose his will to that of the regular authorities of a state. Like the bat in the fable, he has sided with the party that appeared strongest to him, and when he has blundered in his choice, has frequently had ample cause to rue his mistake. In the great contest which took place about 300 years ago, between Charles V. king of Spain, and Francis I. king of France, (both Catholics,) so equally were sides balanced, that the pope had a difficult matter to decide as to which would probably prove the strongest. At last, as he was obliged to choose one, he adopted that of Francis. He miscalculated however; Francis was defeated; and Charles, to punish the pope for his stupidity, ordered a detachment of the army to march to Rome and attack the city.

The troops obeyed his commands; and notwithstanding their instinctive *awe* and *reverence* for the infallible head of their church, actually stormed the Pope's palace and took his Holiness prisoner; and he was not released until like a repentant child he had promised to behave better in future.

If this was all the respect paid to the Pope when his power was, at any rate, far superior to what it is at present, what kind of obedience can we expect to find in our own time? Very little; as we have proof enough every day. We are all aware of the great improvements that have within the last year been made in the government of France. That they are improvements must be acknowledged by *Protestants* at least of every class: for they have deprived the violent Catholic party, namely the Jesuits, of all power in the management of affairs. These, as is generally the case with violent men, had been taking very improper measures for maintaining their power; such as stopping the liberty of the press and so forth: by which they excited among the French (Catholics as they are) as hostile a feeling towards them, as ever existed against them among us: the consequence was, that at the last election the people were determined to send such representatives as would oppose their measures, and the upshot has been, that the Jesuits have been stripped of all power, and turned out of their

posts at double-quick march : and mighty foolish they now look. For what can be so ludicrous and contemptible, as a crazy animal deprived of that power for mischief on which it depended for its importance, and left to manage for itself, with its own miserable resources : like the enraged turkey-cock it struts and gobbles with impotent violence, and, though threatening much, accomplishes nothing.

These changes, these important changes then, have been made in spite of the fraternity of Jesuits and the great distaste of the Court of Rome. Indeed, so crest-fallen is the latter, that even the King of Spain, poor Ferdinand, petticoat-making Ferdinand, scruples not to kick at it, and to act altogether contrary to its directions.

So much for the blind obedience of a Catholic to his lord and master the Pope; like Sir Anthony Absolute in the play, “no one is so easily led *when he has his own way*.” A short time ago the Catholic Clergy of South America sent a communication to the Pope, setting forth that being quite weary of single life, they had a great notion that entering into the marriage state would add to their comfort ; and so, with his Holiness’s approbation, they would commence a canvass for wives with all possible dispatch. This notification of the wishes of the American Clergy, threw his papal Highness into a sad dilemma. To accede to it would have been to offend those

orthodox bachelors who were too old to hope for marriage themselves, and who would consequently wish for others to keep them in countenance: and yet to refuse compliance was to run a danger, almost amounting to a certainty, that the petitioners would snap their fingers at his authority and marry without it. In this difficulty he thought the wisest course was to follow the plan for which there has been such ample legal authority, namely, to *doubt* on the subject. And in the midst of his doubts, poor man, his life has closed: so that it remains for his successor to settle this knotty point; and it would be advisable for him to make haste with his decision, for the matter cannot remain any long time *doubtful*, whether he wishes it or not. Indeed I shall not be at all surprised if, in a short time, this longing after matrimony infects the whole body of the Catholic Clergy, until at length it reaches the papal throne itself; when in due course of time we shall be favoured with a *Mrs. Pope* and a whole fry of *young Popes*.

I trust I have now said enough to dispel the childish dread that has existed of that silly old gentleman, the Pope of Rome. About as wise would it be to revive the old laws against witchcraft, as to retain those that at present exist for *protecting* us from this childish phantom: and the French have no more to dread from the ruins of the Bastille (if any exist) than we have from the remaining vestiges of Popery.

And now to return to our friends, the Catholics at home: it has been charged against them, that they are making a great hubbub about nothing at all; and that they will not be a jot the better off, when they have obtained what they are asking for. With this I most completely disagree. Is it nothing to regain the privilege which is the very life of the British Constitution,—the right of sending men of their own choice into Parliament? Is it nothing to be freed from a stigma, which countenances injurious distinctions through the whole system of government, and indeed through the whole of society? Suppose, for an instant, that the peaceable inhabitants of Warwickshire, should by some ill-luck give offence to the Honourable House of Commons. How should we feel if a declaratory resolution were to pass, setting forth, that in the opinion of that House, we “Warwickshire fellows are a set of noisy, restless scoundrels, always *hammering* at some thing, and were not fit to be trusted in any thing!” Would not our blood boil at so false a calumny, and should *we* be content with saying, that the injury was a mere imaginary one, doing us no real harm? Should we not strain every nerve until the foul aspersion had been indignantly struck from the minutes of Parliament? Yet the same thing, in degree, is done towards the Catholics: they are declared incompetent to take a place in that House, to which it is most important to them

that they should obtain admittance. And while this blot upon their character is allowed to exist in the law of the land,—that law which ought to be throughout a model of reason and justice, and which to a great extent is so,—can we wonder, I say, that the Catholics should be discontented under such a state of things? No! the wonder is, that they have been *so patient* in awaiting their meed of justice; and most ardently do I hope that the moment for rendering it to them is at length arrived.

And now let me say a few words respecting the opponents of concessions to the Catholics. No one can be more thoroughly convinced than myself, that many of them act from the purest of motives. Some of those who are now taking an active part in the Brunswick Clubs of Ireland are, to my personal knowledge, most upright and estimable men. But they have been too completely embroiled in the contention, to come to a calm unprejudiced decision on the matter. The plains of Waterloo were not the place on which to decide the justice or policy of the French war. Neither is Ireland the country in which the claims of the Catholics can be dispassionately considered. The anger of political contention is there carried to an extent, of which we have no practical conception. The infant imbibes party rancour with its very milk; and the child has often been snatched from the cradle, and with a goblet in

its hand has been taught to drink “to the glorious memory.”

With such facts before us, we cannot wonder that the hostility of the Protestants of Ireland to their Catholic countrymen should be what it is. We, however, can review the subject with greater advantages: our feelings are less excited, and consequently our judgment more at our command. Let us calmly consider this important question. Let us weigh the certain evil of the present state of things with the possible evil of a change. Let us bear in mind, that with every increase in knowledge and civilization, distinctions for differences of opinion have been more and more abandoned. Look at Scotland. Can any part of the kingdom be deemed superior, in the peaceable demeanor of its inhabitants? Yet the religion of Scotland differs essentially from that of England. Attempts were indeed once made to force it to an unwilling conformity with ours: but bitterly did the projectors rue their mistake; for many paid their lives for their rashness. Scotland was roused to a state almost of frenzy, from which it never subsided until its religion was placed in safety from all future attack. Since then, however, the Scotch have become firmly attached to the established institutions of the country; and live on terms of perfect concord with those who, in religious opinions, widely differ from them.

What a contrast does wretched Ireland present!

Her rich soil uncultivated—her mines neglected—her rivers running to waste—her ports unfrequented—her shrewd, hospitable, intelligent people wandering about in all the gloom of poverty and misery! Can this be right? Is this a state of things to be content with? Can that religion, which was intended to confer happiness on all men, require such a sacrifice as this for its security? Let us not think so—let us not *dare* to believe it.

Fellow-townsmen, do not yield up your understandings at the shrine of ignorance and bigotry. Think of the excesses that have in times, not long since passed, disgraced our streets—riots, raised in favour of that passive blind obedience to authority, which now forms the principal accusation against the poor Catholics. Let it not be found that education has been at work without effect; that Sunday Schools have been opened for nothing. Let not those who have toiled for your instruction, feel that their labour has been thrown away. But in that love for religious freedom, which I trust you are about to display, may every one who has aided in the good work, be enabled to exclaim, with conscious pride—"I have helped to produce this—I have my reward."

Believe me, Fellow-townsmen,

Your ardent well-wisher,

A FOE TO CATHOLICISM BUT A FRIEND TO CATHOLICS.

J. DRAKE, PRINTER, NEW-STREET, BIRMINGHAM.

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